

In response to these discussions, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar today released the following statement:

Salazar's Statement on Obama Administration Actions To Deal with California Water Crisis

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar released the following statement on the Obama Administration's actions to deal with the California Water Crisis:

"Today, Governor Schwarzenegger is signing milestone water legislation in Fresno County, one of the counties hardest hit by California's water crisis – a crisis caused by the brutal combination of a three-year drought, the collapse of native fisheries in the Bay Delta, and the fact that California's investments in water conservation and infrastructure have not kept up with its growth.

"I would like to take this opportunity to express the federal government's commitment to being a full partner with the state and stakeholders in laying a foundation for California's water future, providing a sustainable water supply for Californians, and helping those hardest hit – including in the San Joaquin Valley.

"To that end, I am pleased to announce that the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) National Research Council Governing Board is meeting tomorrow and is expected to approve the request of the Department of the Interior and Department of Commerce for an independent scientific review of key questions relating to the California Bay Delta, and how to both protect the ecosystem and provide a reliable water supply.

"Secretary Locke and I are sensitive to the need for operational flexibility in using both the Central Valley and State Water Projects to move water during this critical drought crisis. With tomorrow's timely action, NAS will be on track to deliver the first of two reports by March 15, 2010. "If approved, the first NAS report will direct particular attention to the water delivery restrictions in the biological opinions and whether there are available alternative actions that would have lesser impacts on water deliveries while still providing equal or greater protection for

the species and their designated critical habitat. The NAS report will also look at the extent to which factors other than water pumping (known as “other stressors”) are contributing to the collapse of the Bay Delta ecosystem.

“In addition, the Administration is fully committed to funding and moving forward with the construction of the Delta-Mendota Canal/California Aqueduct Intertie, pending the completion of a Record of Decision on the project, which we anticipate within the next 60 days.

“The Administration is also continuing to pursue the Two-Gates Fish Protection Demonstration Project through the required permitting processes, on an expedited basis. Other potential projects that could supplement water supplies for the Valley include the Patterson Irrigation District Fish Screen project and related Pipeline Project. The Administration is interested in potentially pursuing both projects, subject to federal and cost share funding constraints. In addition, the Department of the Interior has used Recovery Act funds to help diversify Level 2 and Level 4 refuge supplies, and will look for additional opportunities to continue this diversification effort.

The Administration remains committed to working to implement a broad suite of tools to help alleviate the critical water supply and environmental situation in California. As announced in October, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Commerce and other federal agencies are working together under a Memorandum of Understanding that commits the federal government to produce an integrated work plan to address California water issues by December 15. The Administration is also working closely with the state on a variety of important fronts including, in particular, the development of a Bay Delta Conservation Plan. We will continue to pursue all of these efforts, in close tandem with the state and other stakeholders as we address both the short-term and longer-term water needs for California.”